

The garden was in rough shape—wilted, cracked, dry. Rows of withered leaves clung to shriveled stems. Stevy walked the familiar paths between them, his boots crunching over dead vines. This place had once been green and full of life, but now it looked like it was holding its breath, waiting for mercy.

There has to be more, he thought, a low sense of desperation building in his chest.

He went row by row, combing for anything that could be salvaged. Soft tomatoes with bruised skins, onions with yellowing tips, cucumbers already beginning to rot. Produce he would've tossed to the chickens months ago, he now scooped up with trembling hands.

This might feed us tonight, he hoped. It was a pathetic haul, but it was something...

That was enough. It had to be.

He rose to his feet, dusted his hands on his pants, and turned to go—only to stop in his tracks.

Emily was dancing.

At first, Stevy wasn't quite sure what he was seeing. Her arms were stretched out wide, the sticks pointed like antennae sensing the invisible. She spun slowly, one foot pivoting carefully in the dry dirt.

It looked—at first—like she was flailing, just moving her limbs in some childish imitation of dance. But then he looked closer.

There was a pattern.

She stepped to the right, tapped the sticks together—tap tap—then stepped to the left and tapped again—tap tap. She repeated it twice, three times, her pace smooth and exact. Then she raised her left knee and spun to the right, then the left, then right again, in perfect coordination with the sound of the sticks.

Tap, tap. Dance. Tap, tap. Dance.

There was a rhythm—one she alone could hear. The way she moved was fluid, deliberate, confident. She didn't hesitate or stumble. It was as if she had practiced the steps for years in secret.

Stevy stood frozen. His breath caught somewhere in his throat.

As she twirled, the hem of her sundress lifted slightly, fluttering like petals caught in the wind. Dust stirred around her feet, kicked up with every rotation. Tiny particles of earth rose

into the air—not chaotically, but in an oddly elegant spiral. A soft breeze, barely noticeable a moment ago, picked up and began to twist the dust around her in a rising column.

It looked like... like a vortex. A gentle cyclone, coiling upward around her in time with her dance.

Then came the light.

At first, Stevy thought it was the sun catching the dust just right. But it wasn't sunlight. It was her.

Emily's skin shimmered faintly—like moonlight on water. The glow was subtle, but steady, building with each motion. A soft aura surrounded her, silver and gold and something else entirely. Something otherworldly. It radiated from within, as if the joy in her soul had finally found a way to break the surface.

Stevy's hands dropped to his sides. His legs felt like tree roots, frozen in place.

What am I witnessing? he thought.

He had seen his sister dance before. Often, in fact. She would twirl in the yard, spin in the kitchen, hop along the fence rail with her sticks held high like a warrior-princess. But this—this was something else entirely.

There were no words for it. No comparison. It wasn't just movement. It was expression. Emotion. Power.

Is my sister... enchanted?

He had heard stories—of course he had. Tales of old magic, of wandering mages and wildborn spirits. But those were bedtime stories. Fables from the distant mountains or faraway kingdoms. Not here. Not now. Not Emily.

And yet...

She danced with a passion so utterly foreign to the shy, quiet girl he knew. She seemed taller somehow. Older. Her face held no trace of childlike uncertainty—only fierce concentration and radiant purpose.

Stevy's heart thudded in his chest.

The vortex of dust continued to rise, and her aura pulsed brighter. Even the plants nearby seemed to lean toward her, as if drawn by gravity—or reverence.

And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, she stopped.

Her feet came together. Her arms dropped to her sides. The sticks, once an extension of her soul, now rested loosely in her hands.

The dust fell. The light faded.

Silence.

Stevy let out the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. A deep warmth spread through his chest, washing away the weariness, the despair, the ache he'd carried all morning. His eyes welled with tears—not from sadness, but from something like wonder.

He looked down at his hands. They were trembling.

“Wow,” he breathed. “Isn't that something.”

His voice felt too small, too simple, for what he had just witnessed. His heart was still racing. The world around him seemed impossibly still—like time itself was pausing to reflect.

And then, he turned.

He was going to gather his basket and go. That had been the plan. Head home, cook what little he had, try not to think about tomorrow. But as he stepped forward, something caught his eye.

A tomato.

A big tomato.

Red as fire and shining like it had been polished for market. It hung heavy and full, just inches from his face. His hand instinctively reached for it—but paused mid-air.

This wasn't here before.

He blinked. Rubbed his eyes. Looked around.

And froze.

The garden was no longer wilted. No longer dry or lifeless or brittle. Where just minutes ago there had been nothing but shriveled stalks and rotting leaves, now there were rows—rows—of vibrant, thriving plants.

Tomato vines thick with fruit. Cucumber stalks winding upward with coiled green tendrils. Bushes of lettuce, crisp and leafy. Carrots with their feathery tops. Onions, bell peppers, beans. The colors were unreal. Greens more vivid than any he'd seen. Reds and oranges that seemed to pulse with life.

This... this isn't possible, he thought, stumbling backward in disbelief.

He spun around, searching the field with wide eyes. Everything had changed. Every row, every furrow—bursting with abundance. The air itself smelled different now. Rich, earthy, alive. There was even a faint hum in the background, like the garden was singing a low, joyous hymn he could barely hear.

Stevy staggered forward, half-dazed, brushing his fingers over a tomato. It was warm, firm, ripe. Not just edible—perfect.

“What in the world...” he said aloud, voice trembling.

He dropped to his knees again—not out of despair this time, but awe.